



Ricky Ponting
(Australia cricket captain)
"We haven't played anywhere near our best but we've still managed to win thanks to some outstanding bowling from our fast bowlers in particular. We've been in hard, tough fights and we've managed to scrape through without being at our best -- that's the sign of a very, good side."
On winning the VB series on Sunday.



Did U Know?
 Fishing is the biggest participant sport in the world.

What to WATCH

ESPN
 Football Crazy Magazine Programme
 Live at 5:00pm
 Sportscenter India Sports news
 Live at 8:30pm

STAR Sports
 Asian 2006 WC Qualifier Bahrain v Iran
 Same Day Delayed at 2:30pm
Sportsline
 Sports news
 Live at 7:30pm
 Indian Premier Hockey League Bangalore Hi Fliers v Chennai Veerans
 Live at 8:00pm

DAY'S EVENT

Ispahani 6th Nat'l Cricket League
 (Day 3)
 Dhaka v Sylhet
Venue: BNS
 Rajshahi v Chittagong
Venue: Bogra
 Khulna v Barisal
Venue: KDS

PM to give away National Sports Award today
BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will distribute the National Sports Award 2004 today at the International Conference Centre at her office. Each of the 11 recipients will receive a gold medal, Tk 20,000 in cash and a certificate. The recipients of 2004 awards are: Mohammed Miljar Hossain (athletics), Enayetur Rahman Khan (football), Shahidur Rahman Shantoo (football), ASM Farooque (cricket), Mohammad Malek Chunnu (hockey), Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman (swimming), Laila Noor (swimming), Nasimul Hasan Kochi (table tennis), Khurshida Akhtar Khushi (judo), Abdul Halim (boxing) and Sadeque Hossain Khoka (organiser).

Gaibandha cricket
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Gaibandha Cricket Club beat Abahani Krira Chakra by 25 runs in the First Division Cricket League at the Gaibandha Stadium yesterday. Gaibandha CC scored 192-8 in 45 overs after opting to bat first. In reply, Abahani finished their share of 45 overs on 167-9.

Himel breeze on Day 2



SPORTS REPORTER

Golam Rahman Himel composed the first century of the Ispahani Sixth National Cricket League when the Sylhet opener struck an unbeaten 110 against Dhaka on the second day of their opening four-day match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The young left-hander led the Sylhet fightback after the home side posted a challenging first-innings total of 325. Dropped twice at the early stage of the innings, Himel stood alone when Sylhet finished the day on 181-5.

But there was no fightback from former champions Chittagong at Bogra, where they were struggling against hosts Rajshahi.

At Khulna, the home side badly missed their skipper and national captain Habibul Bashar after they had collapsed to 134 all out in reply to Barisal's 194.

DHAKA-SYLHET

Himel hogged the spotlight at the BNS after Dhaka, resuming the day on 261-6, could add 64 runs before being all just before lunch.

The southpaw added 135 runs for the second wicket with Sadiqur after his opening partner and elder brother Golam Mabud fell in the first over of the second session with the total on six.

Dropped twice in the slips by Mohammad Ashraful and Al Shahriar on six and 13 respectively, Himel then punished the Dhaka bowlers with some delightful strokes that included 16 boundaries.

Sadiqur scored a cautious 38 off 148 balls.

With the wicket not assisting seamers, Dhaka captain Khaled Mahmud bowled a spell of off-spin for five overs but it was left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny who gave the breakthrough by dismissing Sadiqur in his fifth over.

Sylhet lost the initiative losing four wickets in the space of 33 runs including Alok Kapali, who mistimed a pull off Arafat and skied a simple catch to wide mid-on.

Himel however kept cool and reached the magical three-figure mark in style, hitting successive boundaries off Arafat in the next over. The stocky batsman even after staying more than four hours at the crease showed no fatigue and looked determined to go on with his captain Tapash Baisya, who was batting on five at close of play.

Earlier, Mahmud, added three runs to his overnight score of 45 before being dismissed by Sylhet medium pacer Rezaul Haque after adding three. The national all-rounder was caught by his Sylhet counterpart Tapash at cover. Although the umpires looked confused on whether the ball was taken on the bounce, a generous Mahmud walked off the ground after his national teammate Tapash said that he took it cleanly.

Anwar Hossain (33) and Arafat Sunny (31 not out) stretched the Dhaka innings beyond 300 but the last two wickets fell on 325. Left-arm spinner Nabil Samad was the pick of the Sylhet bowlers with 4-62.

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PHOTO: STAR

Sylhet's Golam Rahman Himel, who was not out on 110, follows through on a square cut on the second day of the 6th Ispahani Mirzapore Tea National Cricket League match against Dhaka yesterday.

Shoaib's misery mounts



AFP, Karachi

Top Pakistani bowler Shoaib Akhtar suffered a new setback in his battle to regain fitness for Pakistan's rapidly approaching tour of India when his trainers left the country Wednesday.

Pakistan's foreign fitness trainer Murray Stevenson, physiotherapist Daryn Lifson and national academy physio Grant Compton left for South Africa on a private visit just 16 days before Pakistan travel across the border.

The team's English coach Bob Woolmer also departed for South Africa for a knee operation, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officials said.

"I am trying my level best to get fully fit but I am without a trainer," Shoaib admitted. He did not elaborate because he is forbidden from giving press statements pending PCB investigations against him.

Shoaib, who took eleven wickets in the first two Tests, injured his hamstring twice on Pakistan's tour of Australia and had to return home midway through a tri-series one-day tournament last month.

However the 29-year-old also faces disciplinary action which may bar his travel to India, where Pakistan will play three Tests and five one-day games from February 25 in their first full tour.

Shoaib's reported visits to a disco and pictures with girls which appeared in the media during the recent tour of Australia, his delayed

return home and his starting rehabilitation work with a private trainer prompted the PCB to set up a three-member inquiry committee.

"Pakistan would definitely need a fully fit Shoaib for the India tour because you can't beat India with spinners," former Pakistan captain Imran Khan told AFP.

"You need pace bowlers who can get a batting power like India out twice in a Test," he said.

"There is no doubt that Shoaib is not an easy player to handle, but if you make him a scapegoat every time the team loses, you will demotivate him," added Imran, who led Pakistan to 1992 cricket World Cup victory.

The committee may release its findings on Thursday, PCB sources said.

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Fletcher to stay in Eng

Jennings not upset with Smith comment



REUTERS, East London

England coach Duncan Fletcher said on Tuesday he was happy in his job and would not be applying for the soon-to-be advertised position as South Africa coach.

South Africa coach Ray Jennings was appointed on an interim basis until the conclusion of their West Indies tour at the end of May and a United Cricket Board of South Africa spokesman said on Tuesday the permanent position would be advertised this week.

"I'm not applying for it, I'm with England and I'm happy to be with

them," Zimbabwean-born Fletcher told a news conference in East London, where his side will meet South Africa in the fifth of seven one-day internationals on Wednesday.

England won their first Test series in South Africa for 40 years last month, and Fletcher said the team was hungry for more success.

"We've won a huge Test series and the players want to win the one-day series as well.

"It's not difficult for the players to motivate themselves if they're playing for England, although it has been quite stressful with all the travelling we've done in the one-day series.

"But South Africa have to do it as well."

Meanwhile, Jennings said he was not upset by media reports

quoting captain Graeme Smith as saying he would like Steve Waugh to take up the position.

"It's news to me," Jennings told a news conference in East London on Tuesday.

"I know what I'm worth, what I can do, and I'm not perturbed by that. I have a passion to stay in the game, and I have made a mark on the side."

Comments attributed to Smith have appeared in several British publications, the captain saying he would like an Australian in charge with Waugh at the head of the queue.

Jennings said he had an "enjoyable relationship" with Smith.

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PHOTO: AFP

NORTHERN INVASION? NOT QUITE: North Korean fans wave their national flags to cheer their team during the 2006 World Cup Asian qualifying round match against Japan in Saitama yesterday. North Korea lost 1-2.

BCB not on the web yet

SPORTS REPORTER

In this era of information technology, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is still without an official website.

Under these circumstances it is virtually impossible for anybody to get information about ongoing domestic competitions in the country, let alone records and statistics from previous seasons.

Wisden-CricInfo, the world's largest cricket website is the only source of authentic information regarding Bangladesh's cricket but they too concentrate on international matches and competitions and domestic cricket's stats have not been updated for a long time although the 6th National Cricket League (NCL) is already underway.

For scorecards and related news of the NCL, the only first-class competition in the country, one has to depend entirely on media releases from the BCB.

The BCB had signed an agreement with an IT firm Digital Solution to launch an official website which should have been up and running by now. But Digital Solution have not been able to start the site yet.

"They were scheduled to launch the website Tigerscricket.com last month (January). But they need more time apparently because of some technical difficulties," said Zaidan Rabbil, vice-president of the BCB's media committee yesterday without elaborating.

Selectors awaiting Naimur's reply

SPORTS REPORTER

National selectors are waiting for an official reply from former Bangladesh captain Naimur Rahman whether he will join the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) XI squad for the Duleep Trophy in India.

The four-member selection committee had announced a 14-member squad for the Indian first-class competition including Naimur but the all-rounder was quoted on different newspapers that he was yet to recover from injury. He also mentioned he had little interest to make a fresh start in the international cricket after being out for almost three years.

"We only read it on newspapers but we are looking for an official reply. We will only take the decision about him and announce a replacement if he does not turn out to report on February 15," said chief selector Faruque Ahmed adding he would be replaced by an off-spinner if needed. Fahim Muntasir is the likely replacement.

Football's return to BNS on Mar 9

SPORTS REPORTER

Football will return to the Bangabandhu National Stadium with an AFC Cup match between Brothers Union Club and Nisa FC of Turkmenistan on March 9.

After a mutual understanding between the country's two major federations (cricket and football) the National Sports Council (NSC) has decided to allot the grand venue to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) from March.

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Parag retains jr title



SPORTS REPORTER

Mehdi Hasan Parag retained his crown when he shared points with national sub-junior champion

Shamima Akhter Liza in the ninth and final round of the BASIC Bank 26th National Junior (Under-20) Chess Championship yesterday.

Parag, who came to the game

BFF general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal told reporters yesterday that they had a plan to make a fresh start at the venue with the second phase of the Federation Cup but had to change it as the curtain raiser tournament was deferred by eight days.

The Tibet Federation Cup will kick off on February 25 instead of February 17. The season's warm-up competition was delayed as the Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal

with eight straight wins, earned 8.5 points to seal his fourth national junior title.

Golam Mostafa Bhuiyan finished runners-up securing eight points when he beat Mohammad Ali in the last round.

In the other ninth round games, Nahid beat Salehin, Masum beat Robin, Saif beat Mahfuz, Ripon beat Titli while Shiblu got walkover against Bashir.

A total of 104 players took part in the nine-round Swiss League.



PHOTO: STAR

Mehdi Hasan Parag, who became champion, makes a move against Shamima Akhter Liza in the final round of BASIC Bank 26th National Junior Under-20 Chess Championship yesterday.